



## South Carolina Department of Public Safety

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### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** SCDPS Personnel

**FROM:** Director Robert G. Woods, IV *RE*

**DATE:** January 8, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Update: SCDPS Response to COVID-19

I wanted to make you aware that we are continuing to monitor the COVID-19 picture -- both in South Carolina and beyond. Health officials predicted that as people gathered with family and friends over the course of the holidays that stretched from Thanksgiving to New Year's that we would see a resulting spike in cases. If you have monitored recent state numbers, you know that has come to fruition. At the onset of the pandemic last February, we were dealing with a "novel" virus for which there was no playbook. The department took immediate steps to mitigate spread such as activating the COOP Plan; adjusting our enforcement practices to protect officers and the motoring public from close contact transmission; instituting a viral pathogen protocol; and placing our non-essential personnel into a temporary telecommute status. Since then, we have learned much about the virus and how to limit spread of the disease and still perform the duties of our jobs. We have followed the CDC and state health experts to guide our response throughout this process.

As a department whose core mission is public safety, we have a vital role, and to achieve our mission to protect and serve, we must stay healthy. I cannot say enough about how pleased I am that our employees have adhered to prevention protocols -- intended for both the employees' safety and those with whom we have contact in the course of our duties. Our state has been under Executive Order for 299 days. Since that time, we have had 121 total cases (a 9.2 percent positivity rate) with 95 of those employees returning to work and the remainder still in their quarantine period. I also want to emphasize that the majority of positive cases have appeared to be contracted through off-duty activities or from transmission by close family and friends. Therefore, I would urge you to remain extremely vigilant off duty as well, practicing CDC recommendations and avoiding large gatherings in confined spaces.

Our Emergency Management Unit and Office of Human Resources continue to coordinate with health officials on protocols for vaccine rollout. At this time, law enforcement and other front-line essential workers are scheduled to receive the vaccination in Phase 1B. We are in daily communication with state partners about the timeline for a vaccine rollout. Additionally, we have secured locations for vaccine distribution throughout the state and will be scheduling that as soon as we are given the green light by health officials. Once we begin, we believe the process is going to move very quickly since the sites are already identified. Also, front-line law enforcement (starting with the lowest ranks and working up through supervision) will be vaccinated first along with our Telecommunications Operators due to the nature of their jobs. The tentative second tier within Phase 1B will encompass command level law enforcement and other employees identified as critical infrastructure workers. Additional tier implementation will follow SCDHEC guidelines for other state employees. To learn more about the vaccine distribution schedule, visit SCDHEC [here](#).

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According to predictions from experts, we are entering a trying time as we come out of the holidays and before the vaccination is widely available. This reality is further aggravated by the fact that the flu season is upon us. While we are fortunate that reported flu cases within the department have remained comparably low, please continue to practice strict adherence to prevention guidelines: frequent handwashing, facial coverings, testing, and social distancing. We urge you to continue to self-monitor. If you feel ill, if you are running a fever or have other symptoms of COVID-19, protect yourself and your co-workers and stay home. As I said in the recent department newsletter, you have collectively shown resilience and a resolve to meet our mission to serve and protect the public during this trying time.

I want to emphasize that conditions are changing daily. As we adhere to CDC and state guidance regarding the constantly evolving disease, we will continue making adjustments to our operating picture and staffing. I ask you to remain patient and flexible as we work to balance the needs of our personnel. If you have specific concerns, please contact our Office of Human Resources. We will be placing updated guidance on [News Break](#) – click on the “SCDPS COVID-19” banner.

I encourage each of you to stay the course and have confidence that brighter days are ahead.